

## **Media Release**

### **The Mahoosuc Way: New Initiative Promotes Sustainable Tourism**

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The Mahoosuc Way, a new sustainable tourism initiative, was launched today by business, municipal and non-profit leaders in the region surrounding Bethel, Maine. The new group is promoting and encouraging residents and visitors to “Embrace Our Place” by taking a pledge to work together to protect the environment, quality of life and community vitality.

The [Mahoosuc Way - Embrace Our Place pledge](#) is designed to communicate local values to newcomers and visitors and to encourage collective action to protect and sustain the quality of place that makes the area an attractive place to live and visit. By taking the pledge, visitors and local residents express their commitment to behaviors rooted in five core values: Honor this Land; Explore Wisely; Show Respect; Cultivate Community; and Be Climate Conscious.

“As we experience increased demand for outdoor recreation and real estate in our area, doubling down on actions to preserve our landscape while welcoming the tourism economy is essential,” said Karolyn Castaldo, Communications Director for Sunday River Resort. “The Mahoosuc Way pledge empowers locals and visitors alike to be part of the solution and strengthen our community.”

The program grows from the 2019 Community Destination Academy which was sponsored by the Northern Forest Center and Maine Office of Tourism and generated a long-term sustainable tourism strategy for the Mahoosuc region that encompasses Bethel and the towns of Newry, Greenwood, and Woodstock. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and related increases in rural visitation and recreation only added importance to the effort.

“The Mahoosuc Way’s focus on sustainability is well timed,” said Steve Lyons, Director of the Maine Office of Tourism.

“As a result of COVID-19 travelers are looking for experiences that will naturally allow for social distancing; and outdoor recreation aligns perfectly with this. We want to get the message out there that visitors are welcome in Maine, but we need their help in maintaining the natural resources that make this a place that they, and future visitors will want to visit,” he said.

“What I love about The Mahoosuc Way pledge is that it relies on *the essential role of the visitor as caretaker and protector*,” said Kirk Siegel, Executive Director of the Mahoosuc Land Trust which was forced to temporarily close a popular local swimming hole in August in response to overuse and related

Covid-19 pandemic concerns. "This approach of investing in the user is an absolutely critical part of the way forward. I also love how it facilitates conversations in the community between hosts and visitors."

Woodstock Town Manager Vern Maxfield was among those who stressed the importance of balancing visitation and recreation with local traditions and the interests of long-time residents during the 2019 Community Destination Academy.

"I am well aware of the complaint that when people move in they want to change it to be like where they came from," said Maxfield. "Our area is living proof that working with, helping out, and building relationships with visitors, tourists and 'people from away' can make all of our lives more interesting and enjoyable. The Mahoosuc Way shows what a valuable area and traditions we have and should give us the desire to keep it and improve it."

The [Mahoosuc Way Sustainable Tourism Strategy](#) is built on a long-term platform of investment in Regional Coordination, Environmental Leadership, Experience Development, and Workforce and Housing Development. The Embrace Our Place pledge represents a first step by local leaders to build broad-based support and engagement with this strategy among area businesses, visitors, and residents.

Local work is led by the 15-member [Mahoosuc Sustainable Tourism Committee](#). The launch of The Mahoosuc Way – Embrace Our Place pledge was supported by financial contributions from over 30 business, non-profit, municipal, and individual stakeholders. See here for a full list of [Founding Sustainability Partners](#).

Foundational support for The Mahoosuc Way has been provided by the [Maine Office of Tourism's Rural Destination Development Program](#) and the Northern Forest Destination Development Initiative – a program of the [Northern Forest Center](#) supported by funding from the Northern Border Regional Commission.

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